

Invisible Cities

Proposal for an installation by Rob Muir, Alex Hayes,
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Overview

This proposal is for a collaborative installation based on the idea that a city comprises hidden histories, experiences and markers embedded within its form and personality, that point towards myriad possible directions for its future.

Traces of the hidden city surround its inhabitants. Our intention is to explore something of the hidden layers of our own city.

This idea has been approached by a number of artists and writers throughout the last century – perhaps most notably by Italo Calvino in his novel *Invisible Cities*, from which we have derived our project's name. We believe that our approach is a fresh one that takes as its raw material the thoughts, observations and experiences of the people who live in and engage with the city.

There will be three components to our work: contributions from the general public (research phase); an installation at PICA developed in response to the research phase, and a website.

Participation by the general public (research phase)

Our hope is that the public contribution to the work will offer information that would not otherwise be available to us, and provide insights into the hidden aspects of our city. The exact direction that much of the content will take is therefore unknown to us at present, but we expect that much of the content will change the way in which the work's audience views or thinks about the city.

We believe that the public participants are likely to take an active interest in the outcome of the project.

Installation at PICA

The installation will take the form of a collaborative digital video and sound installation situated in one of the upstairs studio spaces. It will comprise three DVD-based projections with audio produced by Rob Muir. The visual component of the installation will be displayed using data projectors.

Website component

A related website will form a central component of the work. Our intention is that the website and the installation will function as independent but interrelated components of the same work: i.e. by viewing both the audience will gain more from the work as a whole, but will not be aware of an incomplete experience by only viewing either the installation or the website on its own.

The content of the website and the installation will therefore overlap in some areas, but it is important to note that the web site will not be an online version of the installation. For example the website may contain interactive maps and diagrams that relate to or extend narrative threads that are present in the installation, but which will also be meaningful to a viewer who has not attended the installation.

Please note that the website will be hosted and developed by the artists, and will require no funding or facilities from PICA. It is our intention that the website address be displayed at the installation and on all promotional material – but not that the website be displayed at PICA itself.

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Our approach

A city can be thought of as an entity assembled by its inhabitants' understanding of what that city is. These understandings affect the way the city's physical structure is built and demolished, how it is used, how it is remembered or forgotten and how it manifests in the collective and individual psyche of its inhabitants.

By collecting people's recollections and observations of the city – but also their anticipations of what the city might become – we would like to assemble a visual city, a kind of ghost city both superimposed on and sitting within the present structure.

The work will use public contributions as raw material for both the installation and the website. Neither the installation nor the web site will complete the other (in the sense that one will explain the other): rather, the content of each will overlap and also diverge to extend the possibilities for interpretation. For example, the web site might contain images, maps or text that relate closely to, but do not repeat the content of the DVDs.

Stage one: research

We will invite the public to send us stories, drawings, or other material on pre-printed cards, via the website and in the form of audio recordings, for use as the raw material for producing the work. The content of the installation will derive from this material and our responses to it.

We will produce and distribute DL format (i.e. 210mm wide by 99mm high) cards for contributors to draw, write, or mark with their response to the idea of the invisible city and/or their own city stories. For example, these might take the form of recollections of lost aspects of the city, memories of events, how the contributor might see the city in the future, or any other response to our city.

Audio recordings – which will resemble oral histories – will serve as raw material for the production of the audio components. These audio recordings will be produced by Rob Muir.

Our belief is that the public contribution to the work will offer information that would not otherwise be available to us and open genuine insights into hidden aspects/individual experiences of our city. The direction that much of the content will take is therefore unknown to us at present, but we expect that the content will change the way in which ourselves as artists, and our audience, view and think about the city.

We believe that the public participants are likely to take an active interest in the outcome of the project.

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Stage Two: installation and website

Installation

The installation will take the form of a collaborative digital video and sound installation situated in one of the upstairs studio spaces. It will comprise three DVD-based projections with audio produced by Rob Muir. The visual component will be displayed using data projects and DVD-based imagery will be projected on various surfaces of the studio – not simply the walls, but also making use of the floor and ceiling to create a physically present cityscape. The audio will also make full use of the space, and will be given equal emphasis – that is, the audio will be an integral but discrete component, rather than a sound track or accompaniment to the visual components.

While submissions received from the public will be used as research material, with elements reproduced in the DVDs and audio, the work will not be documentary in nature, but take the content of the public's contributions as a starting point from which to produce something wholly new. For example, a public submission might contain a story that suggests a visual, textual, audio and/or audio-visual response of a particular kind, and perhaps further research (which may in suggest further possibilities, and so on).

Website

A related website will form a central component of the work. It will precede the installation as a means of attracting public submissions, and will continue to run concurrently with the installation, and perhaps indefinitely. Our intention is that the website and the installation will ultimately function as independent, but interrelated elements. By viewing both, the audience can gain more from the work as a whole; however visitors will not have the sense of an incomplete experience if only one or the other is viewed.

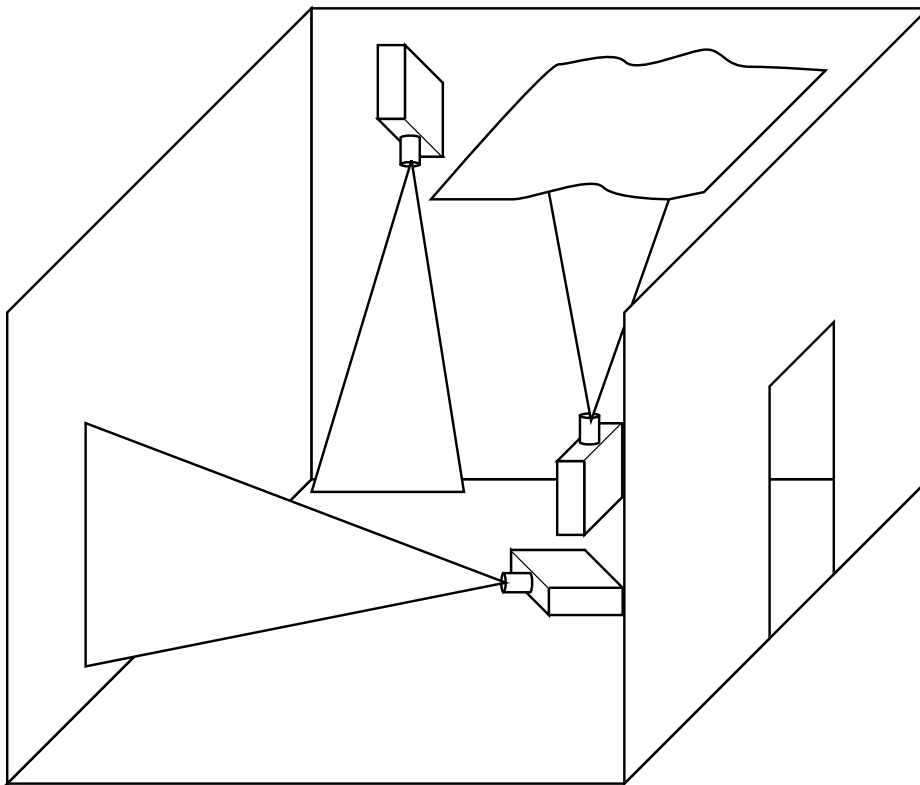
While the content of the website and the installation will overlap, the site will offer its own distinct interpretations of cityscapes in the form of interactive content and animations. The website visitor will be able to discover and explore the content in a manner of free play.

The site will be hosted and developed by the artists, and will require no funding or facilities from PICA.

We anticipate that the web site will be viewed primarily by visitors to the installation: it may also be visited before attending the exhibition. Doubtless the web site will also have viewers who will be unable to visit the installation.

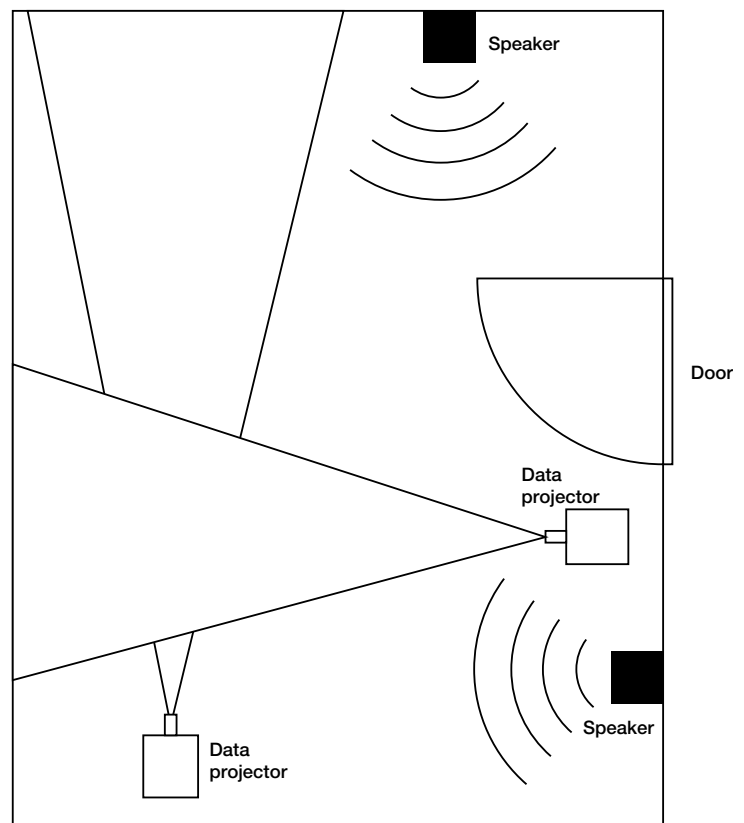
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Preliminary installation plan



The projections will be displayed on the walls, ceiling and floor of the exhibition space

The audio component will make full use of the space, and will run independently of the projections



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Project timeline

Research phase

2 February 2004

Distribute DL format response cards to the public.

2 February 2004

Invisible Cities web site launched, including an invitation to submit material and online forms to allow users to upload files.

February – March 2004

Web site submitted for search engine listing.

28 May 2004

Closing date for submissions from the public.

Production phase

May – July 2004

Compile research material, prepare installation components, and design and develop the final web site.

June 2004

Pre-event promotional work commences (preparation of invitations, press releases, etc).

August 2004

Installation opens at PICA.

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Installation requirements

The installation will require the following resources from PICA:

1 x studio space (preferably one of the smaller spaces on the first floor)

3 x data projectors

3 x DVD players (one per projector)

2 x speakers

1 x amplifier

1 x CD player

Power supplies for the above audiovisual equipment.